

WARD NEWS

Ward 4 - Councilmember Stark

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Happy Belated Earth Day!

I want to wish you all a happy belated Earth Day. I don't have much specific news in this area, but [as Michael Pollan noted](#) in this past Sunday's New York Times Magazine, individuals and communities are really leading the way on issues of sustainability, and the small, everyday choices that we make add up to a great deal. So I'd like to take a minute to honor your work on behalf of the planet, particularly the many district council and other volunteer committees working hard to make an impact on the sustainability of our neighborhoods – the Hamline Midway Environment Group, the Environment Committees of District 10 (Como), District 12 (St. Anthony Park), District 13 (Union Park), and District 14 (Mac-Groveland).

My commitment this Earth Day is to make all of my decisions at City Council through the lens of sustainability, while also working to ensure that these decisions do not conflict with social and economic justice and the very real and immediate needs of human beings.

The Light Rail Project

A significant example of my work for sustainability in Saint Paul is my extensive involvement with the light rail project, which will help people become less car-dependent and continue the trend of moving towards transit in the metro area and beyond. All stakeholders were dealt a serious blow by the Governor's veto of \$70 million for light rail on University Avenue. The ramifications of the veto are still unclear, but project planning is still moving forward.

Parking, Parking, and More Parking

The latest engineering work for light rail on University Avenue has led to some sobering conclusions about the future of University Avenue's on-street parking. In order to accommodate 3-car light rail platforms, and refuge islands that will allow pedestrians to cross University Avenue at most every block, more on-street parking will be lost on the Avenue than we had previously thought. Rather than losing about 1/2 of the current on-street parking, it looks like we may lose 80-90%.

The top concern that this raises is the loss of parking for small businesses on the Avenue that have little or no off-street parking. As such, the Ward 4 office is working with the Mayor's Office, Planning and Economic Development, the Met Council, the business community, district councils, University UNITED and others to develop a plan to help these small

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businesses create off-street parking solutions. Many of these parking solutions should be applicable to other parts of Ward 4 and Saint Paul, not only along University Avenue.

A secondary concern is that street-parking acts as a nice buffer between pedestrians and moving traffic, so the loss of street parking could be damaging to the high-quality pedestrian environment that we would like to create on the Avenue. My former colleague Jessica Treat has floated the idea of maintaining on-street parking on the Avenue and adding bicycle lanes by removing a thru-lane of traffic in each direction (making University one-lane each direction rather than two). Project and city engineers believe this is not practical, because of the 20,000-25,000 cars/day on the Avenue. It seems to me that we should nonetheless explore this option, weighing the impacts of the loss of parking vs. the loss of a travel lane and the addition of bike lanes.

In addition to planning for business parking, we will be working with the community and city staff to look at options for limiting the "park and hide" phenomenon on neighborhood streets near future light rail stations. Dedicated park and ride locations are not currently planned. We are, however, exploring the concept of circulators or other service improvements that would increase access to light rail for those living in places like North St. Anthony Park, Merriam Park, Mac/Groveland, and Como. The re-introduction of Route 83 on Lexington Parkway is already planned. It is also possible that parking ramps near light rail stations may allow people to park and ride for a fee if there is excess parking supply (such as the new Wilder Foundation ramp at Lexington).

Also, the City has received a federal grant to do planning around pedestrian and bicycle access to light rail, and this planning will begin later this year. Maximizing the convenience of biking and walking on and near University Avenue will help bring riders to light rail and to Avenue businesses without needing to park an automobile.

Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety Initiative

Now that people are out and about in true Spring Minnesotan fashion, my office is initiating conversations about a campaign to educate pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists about their rights and responsibilities. Over the course of the summer, we will be working with District Councils, City staff, Transit for Livable Communities, the Saint Paul TMO, and other advocacy groups to combine education, community action, and enforcement in order to heighten the safety of people on our streets and sidewalks.

Sober Housing

We've been working with the District 13 (newly named Union Park) Sober House task force, City staff, and others to draft new language for the zoning code to address sober housing. Sober housing is defined as housing for people in recovery from drugs and alcohol that does not include any on-site services. Sober houses have existed in St. Paul for decades, predominantly in the W. 7th and Summit-Hill/Grand Avenue areas. In the last couple of years, a number of new sober houses have been started in Merriam Park. These houses have had some impacts on immediate neighbors and raised general concerns about how the City does (or does not) define and regulate this type of housing.

Sober House residents have been defined by the Federal Fair Housing Act as a protected class, which significantly limits the ways in which municipalities can regulate the creation of new sober houses. In particular, local land use regulations that limit the number of unrelated adults who can legally occupy a single-family zoned residential unit have been challenged, particularly where the local regulations do not allow for "reasonable accommodation" of sober houses. Last month, the St. Paul Planning Commission hosted a public meeting on the topic and about 100 people attended and exchanged ideas.

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A draft ordinance is being finalized by staff at PED and the City Attorney's Office for public review, including public hearings that will take place in the late spring/early summer at the Planning Commission and then in front of us at the City Council. As always, the Ward 4 office welcomes your involvement, ideas, and feedback. Special thanks to the members of the District 13 Sober House Task Force for their extremely constructive work in this area, and to City staff who have worked hard to craft a fair and balanced ordinance.

Two Kinds of Trash

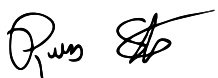
Unfortunately, the April 19 Citywide Parks Clean-Up got snowed out, but I hope you've all been taking some time on walks to help clean up the parks, streets, and sidewalks. The aftermath of a long Minnesota winter isn't pretty, but the remedy is relatively easy and sends the message loud and clear to our neighbors and visitors that we care about our neighborhoods.

Some of you may have already heard about efforts to organize neighborhood blocks with single garbage haulers. Todd Seabury-Kolod reports on his block's success:

The fourth ward's very own alley (Princeton/Sargent between Cleveland and Kenneth) has a 100% of the households with a single trash hauler! Neighbors like the idea of reducing truck traffic and wear and tear on their alley. This effort also saves diesel fuel and cuts back on pollution. And by selecting a mom and pop hauler, folks can keep their dollars right here in our community. Find out how you can get started on your alley. Get your own organizing packet by contacting Todd at 651-230-9589.

Thanks for reading, and please keep in touch.

Best,



Upcoming Events:

- Rock-Tenn Neighborhood Discussions: Energy, Environment, Public Health, Jobs
Come and meet your neighborhood representative on the Rock-Tenn Advisory Panel and share questions and concerns about how this project may impact our community. Questions? – call Nina at 612-788-4151

Saint Anthony Park -- May 3, 10:00am at 890 Cromwell
Macalester Groveland -- May 7, 7:00pm at 2045 St Clair Ave
Union Park -- May 12, 7:00pm at 1466 Portland Ave
Hamline-Midway -- May 17, 10:00am at 1558 Minnehaha W

- The Living Green Expo -- Saturday & Sunday, May 3-4
Minnesota State Fair Grounds
Check out: www.livinggreen.org